

Archeological Survey Of the Binz Engleman Development Bexar County, Texas

By

Harry J. Shafer and Thomas R. Hester



SUBMITTED TO

Carter Burgess, Inc San Antonio, Texas

November 2004

Archeological Survey Of the

Binz Engleman Development

By

Harry J. Shafer and Thomas R. Hester

SUBMITTED TO

Carter Burgess, Inc San Antonio, Texas

By

ABASOLO ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTANTS
San Antonio, Texas

Report No. 4 November, 2004

Binz Engleman Development

Introduction and Background

Abstract

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants (AAC) conducted an archeological survey of the Binz Engleman Development for Carter-Burgess. A pedestrian survey of the 157 acre property was carried out in November 2004 to record and assess archaeological or historical resources that might occur on the property. Two archeological sites were recorded within the project area. Site 1 is a historic 1880-1900 vintage farmhouse. Relative age assessment is based on the presence of square nails and house style. Site 2 is prehistoric in age but yielded no diagnostic artifacts to assess site chronology. Both sites are briefly described below. Neither of the sites is eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, a broad area at the east side of the property was a lithic resource area but does not merit a site designation.

Background

The project area is located in an upland setting of the Blackland Prairie east of San Antonio. The topography is characterized by a gently sloping landscape drained by Martinez Creek, a third-order stream upland tributary of Salitrillo Creek. Salitrillo Creek drains into Cibolo Creek, and major tributary of the San Antonio River.

According to the Unites States Department of Agriculture Soil Survey of Bexar County (Taylor et al., 1962), the soils in the Binz Engleman Development are dominated by the Houston Black Series, particularly soil groups HuB, HuC, and HuD. These soils are heavily laden with Uvalde gravels which constitute 3 to over 60 percent of the matrix, depending on the slope and erosion. The black surface layer changes to gray with olivebrown streaks. A pale brown calcareous clay or marl with mottles of olive brown and gray characterizes the deeper subsoil. This stratigraphy is typical of the uplands of the Blackland Prairie (Taylor et al., 1962: 20-22). The ephemeral nature of the upper or third-order streams provide an unlikely setting for extensive prehistoric campsites. The fertile Blackland soils, however, made this area of Texas prime for early Anglo settlements, especially small family owned farms in the post Civil War era. Urban expansion by the city of San Antonio and Universal City, and the construction of Randolph Air Force Base have encroached and absorbed virtually all of the small farms in eastern Bexar County.

Several archeological sites have been recorded in upland portions of Martinez Creek and Escondido Creeks. Site 41BX513, recorded across Binz Engleman road from the project area, and is described as a "lithic resource area" according to the Restricted Cultural Resource Information (RCRI) file at the Texas Historical Commission. Another survey southeast of the project area on Escondido Creek recorded five archeological sites, 41BX1316, 41BX1317, 41BX1318, 41BX1319, and 41BX1320. Sites 41BX1316-

41BX1319 are described as "lithic scatters." Site 41BX1320 was a 20th century farmstead.

A lithic scatter is a term used by archeologists to describe localities where stone resources were available and exploited by prehistoric Native American groups. Lithic resource area is a more ambiguous term that denotes a locality where lithic resources were available, and may or may not have been utilized.

The lithic resource in question is the Uvalde gravels that blanket parts of the prairie in eastern Bexar County. The deposits are extensive, and were intermittently exploited for the manufacture of stone tools (projectile points, knives, etc.,) by various prehistoric groups that populated the area. Given the observed presence of Uvalde gravels in the project area and the fact that previously recorded archeological sites occur nearby in the Martinez Creek drainage, there is a moderate to high probability that archeological resources will be encountered. AAS has the experience to assess and evaluate any archeological sites that might be found in the project area.

Research Design

A review of the proposed project area and a site visit indicated that the area is densely covered with mesquite and other invader thorny brush and low ground cover. Visibility of the surface varied from minimal to good at times. The project area is abandoned farmland that slopes gently on both sides toward Martinez Creek. The soil conditions observed in the Binz Engleman road cut consists of Houston black clay intermixed with Uvalde gravels composed of chert and chalcedony nodules. The research designed called for a pedestrian survey of the property and shovel testing of those areas showing a likelihood of buried archeological materials.

Field work was carried out by Shafer and Hester. A "no collecting" policy was followed during the survey and shovel testing phase. Artifacts encountered were drawn and photographed for documentation. A final report of the survey will be prepared to provide full descriptions of the environs and soils, two sites, lithic resource area, summary, and survey recommendations.

Survey Results

The prairie surface on the east side of the project area slopes gently toward Martinez creek. The surface in the upland portion at the far east of the project area was littered with Uvalde gravels and occasional evidence in the form of tested cobbles and flakes showed these resources to have been exploited by the aboriginal inhabitants of the area. The density of tested cobbles and flakes was approximately one every ten square meters. As the valley sloped toward Martinez Creek flakes and tested cobbles became slightly denser, or one about every five square meters. Natural exposures such as gullies and armadillo holes provided opportunities to examine subsurface deposits across this and other areas of the site. In each case, the natural soil stratigraphy prevailed and the Uvalde gravels were mainly confined to the upper 20 cm. No buried tested cobbles or flakes

were observed in any portion of the area east of Martinez Creek. The area of tested cobbles shown in Figure 1 is described as a lithic procurement area and was not given a site designation.

One the west side of Martinez Creek the floodplain is much broader and is bordered abruptly by the upland landscape. Houston black clay heavily mixed with Uvalde gravels dominates the upland environment and slope. Lithic procurement occurred sporadically in this area, but much less intensively than was seen on the east side of the creek. No lithic procurement designation was defined for this upland area because soil descriptions describe the Uvalde gravel admixture as occurring over many square kilometers of the upland landscape.

Two sites were recorded during the course of the survey.

Site 1: Site 1 is a wood frame historic farmhouse of the style constructed in the late 19th or early 20th century (Journey et al., 1988). The former property owner, Mrs. Jim Evans, mentioned that original occupants may have been either the Fosters or Rittimans but was unsure. The condition of the structure is poor (Fig. 2). The floors are gone and much of the siding has rotted or fallen into disrepair. The same can be said of the roof where some of the tin has blown off exposing the interior to the weather. We regard the house as not salvageable. The floor plan and sketches from each direction were made during the survey (Fig. 3-5). It is apparent that the house was modified. The front of the house faced south and a front porch was constructed in the southeast quadrant. Later this porch was enclosed creating another room. The old asphalt brick-pattern siding was seen on the interior walls of the enclosed porch. The house was fitted for a pot-bellied stove and a chimney extends from the southwest quadrant room through the roof. No fireplace was constructed in the house. The structure is elevated by both concrete piers and horizontal 6 X 6 wooden beams.

One feature associated with the house was a brick-line and concrete plastered cistern located approximately 25 feet east of the structure (Fig. 6). The cistern measured six feet three inches across at the opening and was bell-shaped. It is filled to a depth of four to five feet.

Site 2. Site 2 was found on the west side of Martinez Creek on an Uvalde gravel-covered upland peninsula that extends onto the floodplain (Fig. 7). It is a prehistoric site marked by a thin scatter of chert flakes, cores, an end-scraper, and burned chert covering an area of approximately 150 meters east-west by 50 meters north-south. Some of the flakes are patinated suggesting use of this locality for an extended period of time in the past.

Five shovel tests were excavated at the site, three along the east-west centerline and one each on the north and south slope. A deep erosion gully at the northwest part of the site provided a deep profile (Fig. 8). Dense Uvalde gravels were encountered in all shovel tests and observed in the erosion profile. Archeological materials were found within the first 20 cm of all but one 30 X 30 cm shovel test, but the density was very low, from one

to two artifacts per level. Full descriptions of the shovel test and soil descriptions will be included in the final report.

The testing of Site 2 indicated that enough cultural material was present to justify assigning a site designation, but the site does not warrant designation to the National Register of Historic Places. Also, the frequency of burned chert nodules and the extent to which the burning reduced the cobbles suggests that hearth fires were constructed on the site. The cultural deposits are thinly scattered and are largely confined to the upper 20 cm. The cultural deposits do not have stratigraphic or contextual integrity other than the site location itself. The shallowness and the swell-shrink characteristic of Houston black clay do not provide conditions that preserve in tact features and other cultural deposits. It is important to record the site to document prehistoric utilization patterns in the landscape, but little information can be gained beyond that.

Summary and Recommendations

The archeological survey of the Binz-Engleman Development led to the documentation of one archeological and one historic site. The historic site, Site 1, is an 1880-1900 vintage wood frame farm house. The condition of the structure is poor and we do not consider the house salvageable. Site 2 is a prehistoric locality. The activities carried out at the site resulted in scattered chert flakes and cores and few artifacts, none of which are immediately diagnostic in age. We do not recommend any additional work be carried out at the site due to a lack of contextual integrity of the upper deposits where all cultural material was confined. It is our recommendation that neither site warrants nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

References Cited

Journey, D. H., S. A Lebo, and M. M. Green

1988 Historic Farming on the Hogwallow Prairies: Ethnoarchaeological Investigation of the Mountain Creek Area, North Central Texas.

Archeology Research Program, Southern Methodist Univerity. Dallas.

Taylor, F.B. R. B. Haley, and D. L. Richmond

1962 Soil Survey of Bexas County. United States Department of Agriculture. Washington, D. C.

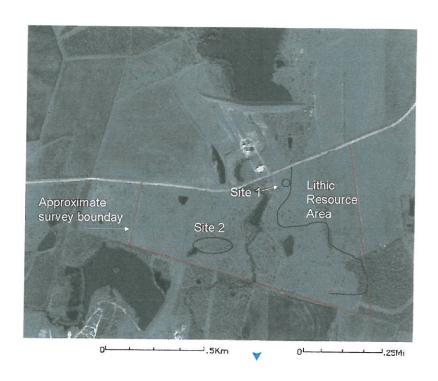


Figure 1. Aerial map showing site location and lithic resource area.

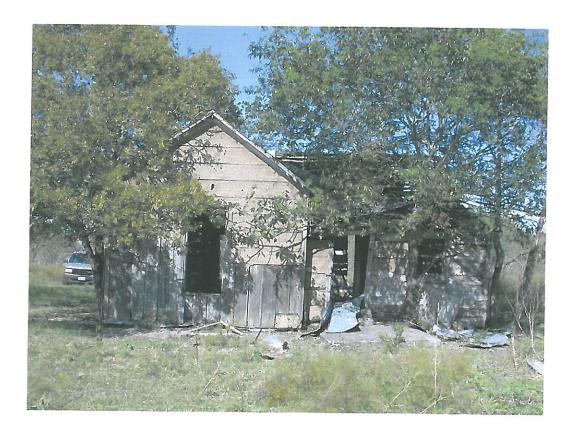


Figure 2. Front or south view of historic house structure (Site 1).

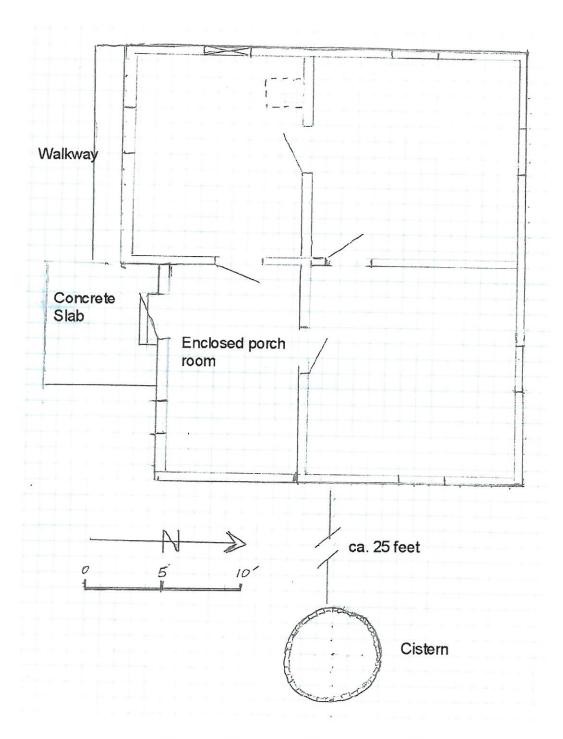


Figure 3. Floor plan of historic house (Site 1).

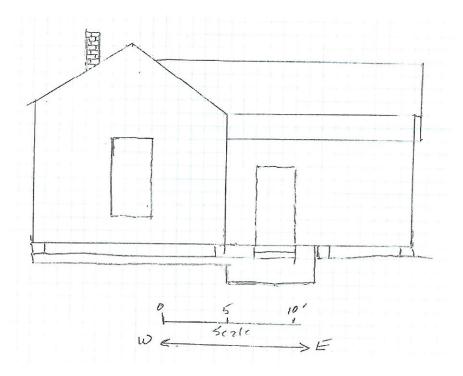


Figure 4. Front or south view of house (Site 1).

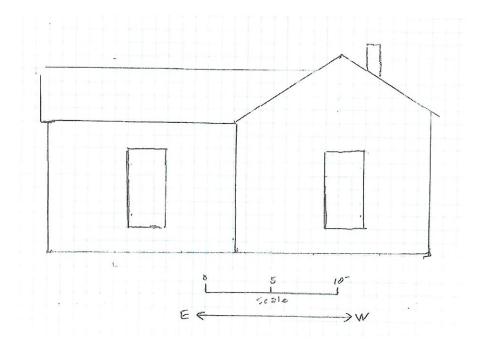


Figure 5. Back or north view of house (Site 1).



Figure 6. Brick and concrete-lined cistern located ca. 25 feet east of the house.



Figure 7. View of Site 2 looking west toward home of Jim Evans.



Figure 8. Natural soil profile in erosion gully in northwest portion of Site 2. Note heavy mixture of Uvalde gravels in the matrix and mottling of soil at the level of the trowel, both characteristic features of Houston Black series at this locality.